The Case For Ambushing Whiteness:
Reconfiguring White Supremacy and Racial Realism

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Senior Honors Thesis
April 15th, 2013
“Thus in effect, on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.”

- Charles Mills, Racial Contract

**Introduction**

During the early morning hours of a warm Cincinnati night on April 7th, 2001 two off-duty city police officers attempted to engage a suspect they recognized immediately to be a man with fourteen warrants for his arrest. Upon the suspect’s sighting of police, the 19-year-old man attempted to flee and was pursued by the officers down an alleyway. Though his warrants were associated with “crimes” like failure to appear in court for misdemeanors associated with traffic violations, such as operating a vehicle without a license and failure to wear a safety belt, the officers who gave chase were unaware of the nonviolent nature of his acts. Perhaps immediately associating his outstanding number of warrants with violence, the officers prepared for the worst.

Conflicting accounts dilute the truth concerning the details, but ultimately after a single shot from Steven Roach’s police-issued 9-millimeter pistol pierced his heart, Timothy Thomas, who had recently become a father, lay lifeless in an alley, seemingly the result of a tragic “accident.” Perhaps the only fact that is undisputed is that Thomas was completely unarmed when he was struck in the chest by Roach’s bullet.

The reality of Thomas’ situation cannot be understood without providing a racialized context grounded in a larger historical framework of anti-Black racism in the United States. For Timothy Thomas was a Black man, murdered by Steven Roach, a white police officer. Though this dynamic in itself does not represent an apriori value (due to the subjectivity in race as a construct), in a culture that manufactures racial hierarchy and places significance in the

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pigmentation of one’s skin, race becomes a social reality with very real consequences. Thomas’ blackness not only informed the (re)actions of Officer Roach, but was very much a factor in creating the situation in the first place.

The history of the United States reveals a deeply racialized country based firmly in the hegemonic dominance of white supremacy, the systemic framework responsible for Thomas’ slaying by police. White supremacy should be understood as the promotion of white domination and white transcendental normativity, which hierarchically situates whites as the top-tier of valuation in all culturally valuable aspects. Rather than an exclusive framework to understand racism, white supremacy entails the adoption of a Eurocentric value system that enforces heteronormativity, male domination, ableness, and many other systems of oppression. In order to rationalize their most overt forms of oppression, like slavery, whites dehumanized Black women and men by objectifying their bodies. Through the creation of mythos that fundamentally equated Blackness with traits viewed to be irrational, animalistic, and primitive, whites were able to legitimate their own racist consciousness. By creating an oppositional system of valuation between that situated whiteness above Blackness, this framework immediately imposed an apriori understanding of one’s identity based solely on the pigmentation of one’s skin.

Using such a notion, one that maintains a preexisting moral and behavioral essence, whites believed the Black body to be an object that needed to be controlled:

From the perspective of whiteness, the Black body is criminality itself. It is the monstrous; it is that which is to be feared yet desired, sought out in forbidden white sexual adventures and fantasies; it is constructed as a source of white despair and anguish, an anomaly of nature, the essence of vulgarity and immorality.²

Such mythos surrounding the Black body became deeply rooted within the development of institutions and structures that reified, as well as provided new information with which to support the continued widespread public investment in white supremacist ideology. By manipulating cultural practices like scientific inquiry, a racist construction based in so-called “objective” data was developed, making the reality of racism biological. Much like science, religion supported the exclusion of Black beings from humanization. Further, the development of more systematic governmental structures created a deeply embedded reliance on racist ideology in the country’s structural framework.

The historical reliance on such concepts cannot be separated from our current existence within a white supremacist paradigm. Our cultural reliance on racism and the valuation of white transcendental normativity will be made evident throughout this essay, and a new understanding of our current racist reality will become evident. Racism as a phenomenon grounded in Western modernity can be viewed within a limitless number of expressions in the United States, as evidence of its presence exists in everything from the clothes we wear to the types of hairstyles we find beauty within. Further, racism is perhaps most totalizing in creating a system of white hierarchical dominance, especially by creating racial inequity:

[B]lacks are six times more likely than whites to be incarcerated. Blacks constitute 40 percent of those executed. Although Blacks are about one-eighth of the national population, some 1.2 million Blacks are under lock and key. White males make up a little over 35 percent of the population, yet they constitute more than 80 percent of the Forbes 400 group.3

Such discrepancies represent simply one possible scope through which we can identify the normalization and privileging of whiteness in contemporary America. A multitude of other ways in which racism is manifested will be provided throughout this essay.

In 2013, the sad reality in this country is that most whites are unable to describe racism in ways that resonate with the experiences of Black women and men. For many in a culture of whiteness, especially one that attempts to distance itself from racism, the thought of white supremacy conjures mental images of ghastly hooded figures dressed in long white robes that choose to spout overt hatred. Though this may be true for a small majority of white racists, for the majority, the reality of their racism is hidden from public view in an effort to purposefully avoid the uncomfortable reality of inequity in this country. White supremacy and its manifestations are not merely theoretical based in the historical context of this country, but exist within our current cultural values, institutions, and attitudes. For it is this culture of whiteness that has encouraged the long history of white people’s sadistic enjoyment in mutilating, torturing, and murdering Black bodies. Whether considering the lynching and brutal murder of Emmett Till, the government funded Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, or the police firing 115 shots into Raymond Herisse4, mutilating and utterly disfiguring his body, the presence of white supremacy as an operative norm throughout this country’s history is necessarily implicated.

The evidence of such a system of oppression becomes evident in the case of Timothy Thomas. Though popular media outlets at the time attempted to portray the situation as an anomaly, Thomas’ death at the hands of police, the supposed authority of justice tasked with protecting all citizens, is all too common for many living within spaces lacking privilege and protection from hegemonic structures of power. That Thomas’ “accidental” death came by the hands of police was not shocking to citizens of Over-the-Rhine, the neighborhood in which Thomas resided and the shooting took place. For many of the residents, Thomas' murder was

simply another in the string of murders by police that resulted in the deaths of fourteen other Black Cincinnatians between the period of 1995-2001. The lives taken before Thomas’ were those of Harvey Price, Darrell Price, Lorenzo Collins, Daniel Williams, Jermaine Lowe, Randy Black, Michael Carpenter, James King, Carey Tompkins, Alfred Pope, Courtney Mathis, Roger Owensby Jr., Jeffery Irons, and Adam Wheeler. When viewing these men as numbers, it becomes hard to grasp the “human face” associated with their deaths. These men were sons, partners, fathers, uncles, and cousins – taken from their families and friends well before their natural conclusion under the guise of white supremacy.

These murders can be even further explored, as five occurred within the eight-month period between November 2000 and April 2001. Additionally, three of the suspects were completely unarmed while shot, including Thomas. Three of the cases at the time of the shooting were considered “questionable,” including the cases of Roger Owensby, “an unarmed man who died of asphyxiation after being subdued by several officers,” Michael Carpenter, “who was shot at nine times through a car window,” and Lorenzo Collins, “who, armed with a brick, was shot after being surrounded by 15 officers.”

Cincinnati’s police officers were literally at war with the Black bodies that inhabited the city, and council members and other city leaders were complicit in continually attempting to distance the murders from the embedded racism, both conscious and unconscious, that undeniably made them possible. Clearly in the city of Cincinnati the murder of Black bodies was seen to be the normative procedure, especially when supplemented with the socially constructed preexisting essence of blackness that all but justified the use of force against the perceived “Black criminal.”

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With the common narratives constructed surrounding the Black male body, especially concerning criminality and aggressiveness, it becomes easy to understand why these officers clutched their triggers out of the perceived “fear” of the Black “other.” The mythos provided by a white supremacist culture that promotes the value of whiteness as transcendental norm creates the reality of hierarchical inferiority based on one’s “race.” Regardless of the account of Thomas’ murder that one decides to accept, the harsh reality is that Roach’s unconscious racism, which became embodied and habitualized through years of socialization into the larger racist culture, is responsible for the death of an unarmed 19-year-old man.

Over-the-Rhine, a predominately Black area in Cincinnati with significant poverty, is known for its criminal enterprise, which was most famously depicted in the film *Traffic*. The plot centers around the U.S. War on Drugs and the lives of characters who all have varying situations connecting them unknowingly. One of the contributing stories introduces us to wealthy white teenagers from another Cincinnati suburb, Indian Hill, who drive into OTR to score crack cocaine and an assortment of other drugs regularly. The film has its problematic depictions, such as the depiction of Black hypersexuality, illustrated by the drug dealer with which the young, well-protected white teenage woman becomes engaged in a sexual relationship in order to fuel her addiction. However, the film is important in recognizing an important reality that often, and especially in the case of drugs, is overlooked by popular media: whites commit disproportionately high rates of crime, “the majority of illegal drug users and dealers nationwide are white, [yet] three-fourths of all people imprisoned for drug offenses have been black or
Clearly, such a contradictory disparity cannot yield a conclusion other than asserting the recognition of white supremacy as reality in our society.

This begs the question: whom are we enforcing the law upon? The widespread nature of racial profiling in this country has been studied with prominence for the few decades, and perhaps the clearest example comes when considering the disproportionate number of traffic violations given to Black drivers. It stands that we can reasonably assert that all drivers, regardless of skin color, commit the same kinds of driving mistakes and likely in the same frequency, making it unlikely that drivers would have been stopped based on simply driving ability. One of the most comprehensive studies was compiled by John Lamberth, who after recording over 43,000 drivers on a New Jersey turnpike found that “[b]lacks were 4.85 times as likely to be stopped as were others.” This disproportionately high number of arrests, based solely on the commonality of the skin color among those stopped, provides a powerful example of how racism manifests itself in contemporary America. Rather than overt in our evaluation, like examples from nineteenth century American history, the phenomenon of “Driving While Black” cloaks itself behind our criminal justice system. Using a circular model that is self-reinforcing, the myth of Black criminality has come to justify police profiling of Black bodies, which simultaneously reinforces such mythos by continuing to disproportionately send them to prison.

Timothy Thomas’ own struggle with racial profiling can possibly explain the fourteen warrants for his arrest, most of which came from simple traffic violations like failure to wear a

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Due to his Black skin, Thomas became a target for the same disproportionate number of police stops that Lamberth illustrates in his data collection. Though the case of Cincinnati is particularly highlighted for the purposes of exposing the whitewashed cultural framework responsible for Thomas’ death, cases of racial profiling and police brutality in the United States are widespread.

After Thomas’ murder Lt. Col. Richard Biehl, one of the four assistant chiefs at the time, stated that “the shootings must be considered individually and not as part of a pattern.” In the age of colorblindness, we are programmed to view incidents of police brutality and excessive force as isolated incidents stemming from confusion, fear, and ignorance rather than manifestations of deeply imbedded cultural racism. The quote by Charles Mills that began this essay identifies the epistemic falsehoods our society has adopted concerning race, such that many of even those privileged by the systemic expressions of such distortions of reality are unaware of their presence. By structuring blindness in such a way that our culture constantly constructs false knowledge and maintains our ignorance surrounding racism and it’s very significant role in the lives of all Americans, we allow unsubstantiated claims like that promoted by Lt. Col. Biehl to exist as the popular narrative.

Even the New York Times, a media source upheld as perhaps the pinnacle of journalism, participates in such distancing from reality in reporting on the murder of fifteen Cincinnati men by police in a six year period: “[n]one of this adds up to conclusive proof of a national pattern.” However, even their own denial is effectively contradicted within the same paragraph,

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“[n]ationwide, blacks and Hispanics are twice as likely as whites to be subjected to violent behavior when stopped by police officers, according to Justice Department statistics.”\textsuperscript{11}

Ultimately, the need for statistical data to understand that Blacks are subjected to racial profiling and more often encounter violence from police officers is maddening. Statistics provide a numerical barrier, which separates whites from the reality that marginalized groups are subjected to oppression disproportionately.

As is often the case, many whites offered what they believed to be a legitimate defense of the problematic aspects concerning the predatory nature of the Cincinnati Police Department. By framing questions that seek ways to deemphasize Roach’s racism and instead draw attention to actions that Thomas should have taken in order to remain alive, we reveal the absurdity of the white consciousness. Such a line of questioning is itself an expression of white supremacist ideology in operation, and serves as a defense mechanism with which one can distance themselves from racism by refusing to acknowledge reality.

Questioning Thomas’ attempt to elude police becomes a way to avoid conversations on the problematic nature of cultural white supremacy. Firstly, the learned instinct to run from police is a reality produced by anti-Black racism itself. Days after her son Timothy’s murder, Angela Leisure exclaimed, “[i]f you are an African male, you will run.”\textsuperscript{12} Reverend Damon Lynch III expressed a similar point, “blacks often run from the police because ‘they’re thinking, ‘If I don’t run, I get beat up, get my head pushed into the ground, I get hit with sticks, I get pushed into the car door.’”\textsuperscript{13} The fact of the matter is that we cannot simply limit the

conversation to an abstracted one based on theoretical principles of justice as purported by Cincinnati Police. In our contemporary society, police brutality and the foundation of racism have further amplified racial tensions and, therefore, distrust in the Black community of the criminal justice system and those who enforce it. Timothy’s choice to run “in the moment” can and should be viewed within the historical context of white supremacy and anti-Black racism in the United States. With a criminal justice system that has been responsible for countless deaths, whether directly or indirectly, it becomes reasonable for Thomas to be suspicious of the white officers that attempted to apprehend him. As I will later argue, by shifting the focus from individual level choices to the systemic framework that manufactures the kinds of choices we are able to make in the first place, we can more readily engage ourselves in conversations that promote honesty and justice concerning race in this country.

My own life experiences, though I was only ten years old at the time of his murder, were already deeply contrasted with that of Timothy Thomas, though we shared a hometown. I vaguely recall sitting at my kitchen table during Dan Rather’s broadcast of the CBS Evening News as he reported Roach’s tragic performance of racist ideology. Sadly, the commentary over dinner remained unengaged with the injustice continuing to express itself. Such is the experience of a devastatingly large number of white people in this country, myself included. My own ignorance and habitual choice to ignore the racist implications and significance of murder comes as a result of my socialization within white supremacist normativity.

In one of the smallest suburbs on Cincinnati’s east side, there was little talk in my community about the death of yet another Black man. My parents, following the example of many whites Americans, chose to settle in the suburbs after securing careers with the aspirations of upward mobility and the American Dream. The aesthetic value of white picket fences drew
most whites to similar areas, as “urban” living was stereotypically associated with impoverished “ghettos” where those who made questionable life decisions resided. Within such an experience, I grew up around people that looked, acted, talked, thought, and were presented with the same choices as me.

This delayed my conscious recognition of race, particularly within my own life, which I had been taught to distance from slavery and civil rights that defined our quest towards equality. As such, the first experience I remember vividly is one that distanced the reality of Thomas’ murder, and instead focused on the riots that arose in the days following. Further exemplifying of the ability of whiteness to produce open contradictions, the dialogue didn’t center on the violence that had occurred, but rather the potential for violence to occur in our community. However, my community wasn’t misguided by our understanding within white supremacist normativity, as the preexisting essence of violence, rage, and further, the desire to produce white terror, that are ascribed onto the Black body legitimate our fear of the “terrorists” coming to destroy the storefronts of our white towns. This narrative is one that I quickly realized was fundamentally false and based on a systemic framework of white supremacy that has existed since the founding of this nation.

The normativity of whiteness within my experience was a type of implicit concept, one that I understood to be unquestioned in my experiences. My childhood innocence, my sense of bliss in the world, was not forcibly taken from me; it was unquestionable provided by every person and structure around me – from my schools, sports teams, friends, and family. The ability to remain ignorant to the struggles of a large number of Americans to create identity is indicative of my own white privilege. My absolute freedom to make choices to define myself, without the fear of being equated with a stereotype based solely on a subjective phenotypic characteristic I
possessed, is tragic when considering the very divergent reality faced by someone like Timothy Thomas.

As a white, middle-class, male in a society providing privileges to each of my intersecting identities, I often face questions concerning my authenticity and commitment to the field of critical race theory. Based on the historical legacy of white guilt as motivating anti-racist intellectualism, I believe the question to be extremely relevant and important. Certainly, I acknowledge that I cannot know my own unconscious motivations concerning the commitment to dismantling white supremacist norms, but my conscious commitment has been shaped by experiences that have contradicted my “colorblind” childhood reality and further allowed me to engage in an honest analysis of reality.

I acknowledge the dangers associated with writing about such a topic. Coming from my own perspective as a white male, one always has the potential of falling into mainstream critique that simply reinforces the white supremacist framework it seeks to destroy. George Yancy describes such a reality: “[w]hites who deploy theory in the service of fighting against the seduction of white narcissism, the recentering of whiteness, even if it is the object of critical reflection, and, hence, the process of sequestration from the real world of weeping, suffering, and traumatized Black bodies impacted by the operations of white power.”14 By theorizing about whiteness, we must be careful to remain focused on not only whiteness, but racism itself, as to avoid getting “stuck in this position, endlessly caught up in describing what we are doing to whiteness, rather than what whiteness is doing.”15 Throughout this paper, the tragic narrative of dehumanization, systematic oppression, and ultimately genocide of Black bodies is presented

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with uncompromising implications: *white people, both historically and presently, are responsible for these deaths.*

In some cases, authors who present theoretical observations on racism implicitly suggest their separation from such a norm. I have consciously attempted to reject participating in such distinctions in contrast to the white supremacist norm that I will illustrate in this paper. I have been a conscious racist in my past, and I continue to be both a conscious and unconscious racist in the present in many ways that I cannot begin to understand, even as I present a paper in the anti-racist tradition of critical race theory. As much as my conscious thoughts may be filtered, especially concerning abstract arguments, I am able to recognize, due to my exposure to the anti-racist tradition, that my unconscious habits come as a result of the privilege I inherently possess within a system of white domination. But even my individual confessions of racism are not necessary, as white supremacy is maintained through the privilege that social structures grant me through my inheritance of value-laden pigment, whiteness. Even without my awareness, I have been given privileges and advantages that have allowed me to succeed in ways denied to many Black women and men, thus making my separation from whiteness as a cultural value impossible.

Though my own distinction between conscious and unconscious racism may seem to connote a hierarchical dynamic, I believe ultimately they both implicate me, the author of this essay, as a racist. Whether conscious or unconscious, the impact of my own individual racism within the structure of a larger systemic framework of white supremacy will continue to lead to the mutilation and murder of Black bodies like Timothy Thomas. In this sense, I will not lay claims to my own cleansing of this problematic aspect of my socialized cultural background. In fact, I plan to illustrate how even those resistant to their own status as white racists can and
should be awakened to a new reality, one that implicates all beneficiaries of the systematic framework of white supremacist domination in its continuance.

This essay is an attempt to shift the scope of discussions of racism to implicate the white racist. In recognizing the suffering imposed on Black bodies through white supremacy, we necessarily direct our attention to whiteness as the culprit of making such a reality possible. By developing a further understanding of the white racist, all while directly connecting their individual role in maintaining such a paradigm, I believe that we can better understand the pervasive nature of racism in our culture. As those responsible for perpetuating racism, I believe whites possess a responsibility to recognize their own role in oppression with intellectual honesty while pragmatically investing themselves in the dismantling of such a framework.

By no means does this mean that the focus of the collective struggle against white supremacy should be centered on whiteness itself. On the contrary, our discussions should center on the pragmatic solutions our society can provide to those currently suffering within the cultural framework of white transcendental normativity. But without wide recognition of this problem by those responsible for oppressing Black bodies, alternate realities become impossible, especially in a pragmatic sense. Given the imbedded nature of white supremacy and the structured blindness needed to ensure its continuance, I chose to write this paper as an introductory investigation into our current racialized reality. By investigating the white racist, particularly the embodied nature of a white epistemology of ignorance, and the steps that are required to see past our limited view of European domination, I hope to provide a framework that can be used to illustrate the challenges of subverting white supremacy within our current American context. In this way, this paper is meant to be simply another “piece of the puzzle” in our realization that racism is a culturally pervasive phenomenon that realistically may never be fully resolved.
Ultimately, in our American context, it will take a unified approach to fully engage in an anti-racist approach to racism. Though I believe this possible, in our current understanding of race in this country, our society are limited by its own ignorance in making even the first necessary change. My own engagement with philosophical analysis forces me to acknowledge the reality of the impossibility of a wholly anti-racist movement in the United States. However, I believe that working within the structures currently existing, such as mediums like this very publication itself (based in philosophy’s own whiteness), is the only tangible way for me to shift the long-term narrative towards a less distorted racist reality. It is within this pragmatic scope that our society must operate, even if we recognize the absurd nature of our struggle towards an anti-racist society. Like the character Sisyphus in Greek mythology, who is punished by being damned to an eternity spent moving a boulder up a mountain, only to know that it will always roll down the hill without reaching the top, we understand the hopelessness of this task. The weight of the rock, much like the vast and incomprehensible nature of white supremacy, must continue to warrant our struggle. Within the reality we have been placed within and played an active role in maintaining, we must attempt to create change with the acknowledgement of our own insignificance to systemic change. Even if impossible, social justice drives its agents to not be bystanders in promoting apathy. Through this recognition, I write this essay in hopes that my limited understanding of injustice will compel further study, with the ultimate goal of creating dialogue in an area often purposefully made invisible.

In the first two sections of this essay, I attempt to develop a clearer definition of racism as both an epistemological and embodied reality in American society. Wholly separate from notions of colorblindness that drive the nation’s current rhetoric, this type of racism has a clear perpetrator: white people. By developing this conception and placing it within manifestations of
our current racist culture, I hope to develop a more holistic evaluation of what it means to be a racist in America.

In the third section, I focus on the concept of ambushing whiteness in order to promote an antiracist awakening. By ambushing of whiteness as an embodied “white opaque racist self”\textsuperscript{16} we can create a white recognition of transcendental normativity and a conscious commitment to anti-racist practices among the perpetuators of racism. Ambush itself, however, is not independently sufficient in our efforts to engage with unconscious habits of the racialized understandings we have adopted.

Finally, I reject pragmatic attempts to construct a culture that can subvert the racist norm our society has manufactured. I will argue that a culture that promotes ambush on whiteness in its everyday operations and practices will be necessary to subvert our white supremacist culture, but our intentionally constructed misunderstanding of race makes practical frameworks that attempt to combat racist norms almost always ineffective. I argue that only through the recognition of the racial reality in this country can we begin to construct a cultural narrative that allows for ambush on a large scale.

\textit{“Once established in a social mind-set, its influence is difficult to escape, since it is not a matter of seeing the phenomenon with the concept discretely attached but rather of seeing things through the concept itself.”}

- Charles Mills, White Ignorance

1. The Epistemology of Ignorance, Racism, and Unknowing: Manipulation of Consciousness

\textsuperscript{16} Yancy – Look, A White p. 172
Everything that we have come to “know” concerning race in our contemporary understanding is deeply flawed in a purposeful way by our exposure to white supremacist cultural values. Not only is our “knowing” based within a historical context, but also an experiential one, as we continue to become socialized into the world of whiteness through our daily encounters with race and racism. The United States, and its white majority, has constructed a culture that promotes white transcendental normativity, such that all non-whites are equated with inherent inferiority. This racialized understanding manifests itself innumerably, yet silently, as a society based on white domination must continually structure itself to exclude the experiences and realities of those it oppresses. By limiting cultural exposure to such narratives on race, we produce a kind of ignorance, which becomes evident when one struggles to define race and racism and the ways that they exist in our perceived “colorblind” society.

First, our society must recognize that race itself is a socially constructed category based upon subjectivity rather than objectivity in every sense. Whites have constructed our raced reality in order to separate, though biologically such distinctions have no basis, “[w]hen ‘real’ means social realities that are historically inevitable, natural, or invariably a feature of every society, then races are not real.”\(^\text{17}\) This does not discount the very \textit{real} manifestations of race that occur in the lives of those non-whites living within a culture of white supremacy, as seen in the introduction. Further, even if innate inferiority is known to be false, the structural expressions of white supremacy limit the abilities of non-whites to secure privileges needed to exist independently of their racial categorization within white society. Stuck within this restrictive paradigm, the reality of white supremacy becomes ever-present for nonwhites.

Undoubtedly, white supremacy is pervasive as a cultural framework in American life. Children in the United States, regardless of their race or cultural background, are trained within a system of whiteness and taught to uncritically accept the hierarchy it asserts. Through a process of mythification, described by James Snead as “the replacement of history with a surrogate ideology of [white] elevation or [Black] demotion along a scale of human value,”\(^{18}\) whiteness creates an exclusionary reality that allows it to become not only operationalized, but also rationally and morally legitimated within our culture based in the ideal of “objectivity.” As I will argue in this section, our acceptance of such a paradigm is the result of deep socialization that leads to the production of ignorance, for which we consciously are removed, such that we become blind to the reality of white supremacy.

Charles Mills describes the reality of the entrenched nature of racism as operative in *The Racial Contract*, an exploitative contract that constructs and manufactures our knowledge concerning race. The contract itself, much like the social contract theories proposed by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, is “a set of formal or informal agreements or meta-agreements (higher-level contracts about contracts, which set the limits of the contracts’ validity) between the members of one subset of humans.”\(^{19}\) In that the social contract provides a structured guide to morality, the Racial Contract posits a way of understanding the segregated view of humanity based on one’s determined value in a culture of whiteness, “the general purpose of the Contract is always the differential privileging of the whites as a group with respect to the nonwhites as a group, the exploitation of their bodies, land, and resources, and the denial of equal

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socioeconomic opportunities to them.”\textsuperscript{20} When fully implemented, the Racial Contract connotes a hierarchical understanding of race, promoting white hegemonic dominance and transcendental normativity in the culture at large.

Though the Racial Contract is described by Mills as a “historical actuality,”\textsuperscript{21} it is also an alternate understanding of reality, or “an invented delusional world”\textsuperscript{22} that allows whites to have their supposed superiority validated by objectivity. Certainly functional for those benefitting from their newly validated superiority, the contract is based upon a fundamental falsehood; that race does not inherently connote anything, and therefore does not exist in a biological reality. Mills proposes that we must develop an “inverted” epistemology in order to continue our illusory existence, where “one has an agreement to misinterpret the world . . . a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.”\textsuperscript{23} The inability of whites to see the racial reality is a product of white supremacy itself, as our knowing becomes dependent on our complicity in the normative structures of whiteness.

The notion of epistemic injustice, proposed by Miranda Fricker, allows us to understand the ways in which our epistemological framework can serve a restrictive function. In this way, the victim, who is the product of an exclusionary reality, comes face to face with injustice as operative within their socialized epistemology. Fricker asserts that such knowers are wronged by being limited in their capacity to know, as their inability to find words to describe or make sense

of their experiences renders them invisible and muted within a white supremacist framework.²⁴ Using this framework to analyze the development of such injustices within our epistemological foundations, we can shift our focus to the subversion of truth within the white consciousness. Through the promotion of epistemic violence, what I will define as a forcible reconstruction of one’s knowing (which produces a state of unknowing), white supremacy both limits knowledge production and intentionally constructs false knowledge, allowing for the continuance of white normativity. White supremacist ideology is violent, such that our understanding of reality is forcefully manipulated and situated within systemic whiteness.

By further reinforcing false knowledge, or ignorance, whites are able to structure reality in a way that allows white supremacy to continue operating, often outside of white consciousness. As Mills argues, “[o]ne has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority.”²⁵ Through the development of the Racial Contract within the history of the United States, the nature of the norms espoused within it become more and more systemically oriented and ultimately normalized. Such an inverted epistemological framework produces real and disturbing consequences, as the murder of nonwhite women and men becomes legitimated through the Racial Contract. By tracing the history of white supremacy’s role in oppression during the global age, the development of strategies to legitimate hierarchical organization of white lives above that of nonwhites becomes clear:

- as a general rule, that white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race are among the most pervasive mental

phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement.  

In other words, Mills asserts that whites have created an epistemological framework that allows for the ability to rationalize the dehumanization and systemic genocide of those defined outside of whiteness. The necessity of developing such an understanding, based in ignorance, allows for whites to see themselves as legitimated in exploiting Black bodies, a norm that has been established throughout the history of the United States.

Whiteness as transcendental norm cloaks the politicized nature of itself such that its presence can effectively be hidden from beneficiaries (read: whites) of the Racial Contract. White supremacy as a political and social system was created within a particular mindset, and continues to construct a particular kind of framework to understand the world. Without recognition of the privilege one receives in a society that promotes white domination, the illusory status of colorblindness is maintained. White privilege shields whites from the reality that they are implicated in racism, as “consciousness plays a larger role in white supremacy than it does in white privilege. In contrast to white supremacy, white privilege is an idea to which many white people are emotionally tied in ways of which they usually are not consciously aware.”

When whites are effectively protected by their own whiteness through privilege, the willingness to identify white supremacy as a cultural framework is diminished, making the recognition of a racialized reality improbable.

The white epistemology of ignorance concerning race in the United States produces outcomes that are noticeably contradictory and yet still often go unquestioned. Though privilege is often a topic rejected by whites that accept the cultural rhetoric of individualism, the existence

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of such a reality is noticeable with even a basic analysis of many social situations. Affirmative Action, for example, is a case that many whites view to be flawed and seemingly characterized as a kind of “reverse racism.” Though the argument against such a claim is certainly more complex, by simply evaluating other ways that we legitimate an unfair advantage in admissions offices around the country, we can better understand how privilege operates. Legacies for example, exist largely as a privilege for wealthy white families who have historically been in the position to attend premier institutions of higher learning in this country. However, legacies themselves are almost never analyzed as significant in the same kinds of ways, though they essentially function as a kind of affirmative action for whites. Such a conclusion is merely one example of the contradictory nature of the ways that our particular understandings of race inform our distortion of knowledge.

The reality of white supremacy is that the very structure, values, and norms that we operate under are framed within racist understanding of the world and its history. With our understanding, based within the lens of a Eurocentric framework, it becomes especially difficult to fully question and understand whiteness, and even more difficult to think outside of our current cultural norms in order to develop ways of subverting the production of false knowledge. Within this very limited understanding of the world, which we often falsely equate with “reality,” even the basic tenets of what we take to be true rely on the exclusion of other cultural frameworks, which are based on a fundamentally different axiological foundation. In the case of race, the “knowledge”28 that we have come to produce in order to operationalize colorblindness produces an incomplete view on human history, one that excludes non-Western (read: nonwhite) perspectives and voices who are still struggling to be treated as subjective beings.

28 When appearing in quotations, “knowledge” is understood to be false in nature and based on an incomplete human narrative.
As scholars tasked with promoting particular understandings of the world, those who make the choice to remain complicit and unwilling to recognize reality become implicated in manufacturing false knowledge to support white supremacy and all of its manifestations. The Racial Contract is itself a critique of this kind of whitewashing of history common of white supremacy in the academy, which relies upon the exclusion of voices diverging from white normativity:

[i]ronic, cool, hip, above all knowing, the ‘Racial Contract’ speaks from the perspective of the cognizers whose mere presence in the halls of white theory is a cognitive threat, because – in the inverted epistemic logic of the racial polity – the ‘ideal speech situation’ requires our absence, since we are, literally, the men and women who know too much, who – in that wonderful American expression – know where the bodies are buried (after all, so many of them are our own).29

Through an understanding of white supremacy and the agreement to “misinterpret the world,” we are forced to confront the presence of not only alternative perspectives outside of whiteness, but also the fallibility of the structures that we operate within. This very recognition, particularly of one’s crumbling epistemological foundations based within the epistemology of ignorance, will be discussed in greater detail in section four, where ambushing our manipulated state of consciousness concerning white supremacy is addressed.

However, we must recognize that white supremacist culture is unmatched in attaching itself to even the most fundamental of concepts, which are often equated with universal applicability. It becomes problematic when we continue to rely upon these rudimentary understandings of “truth” without recognizing their subjective nature, and the role that we play in constructing their meanings. For this reason, concepts like justice vary due to their existence within certain cultural contexts. Most Americans understand justice in a very limited scope, due to their exposure to a societally manufactured value system based on the subjective choices of

those in power. Inherent within our conception of justice, our understanding of “morality” exerts its own systematic conformity to white supremacy in discussions of actions we ought not take against others. Often, these discussions are based within cultural contexts that assert notions of property rights and individualistic values that are deeply entrenched within Eurocentric frameworks themselves.

John Locke himself participates within such an assumption, based within his experiences as a member of the English government during the 17th century. By producing conclusions based only on subjective standards of citizenship, Locke uses his social contract theory to merely support currently existing paradigms:

> that being all equal or independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions; for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master, sent into the world by His order and about His business; they are His property, whose workmanship they are made to last during His, not one another’s pleasure.\(^3\)

Clearly, the presence of Locke’s own religious ideals, his individual conception of justice, and biased perspective on equality are pervasive within his development of his theory concerning the state of nature. Even if Locke’s arguments lack our current racialized language, he certainly was defining a definition of equality based in a Eurocentric value system, one that supported his own privilege as a landowning Christian male. In this way, anything done under the guise of social contract theory is a manifestation of the Racial Contract described by Mills.

In fact, many cultures advocate a radically different approach based in communalism, thus rejecting the notion of property itself. We obfuscate the subjectivity of the concept of justice through our partial understandings exclusively based in Eurocentric ideology. By failing to see

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the truly limitless number of alternate possibilities from which we could understand the world, white hegemony has effectively halted the creation of knowledge outside of our current paradigm. In choosing to promote a framework that assumes it to be within human nature to pursue the possession of objects and space, our society has inherently repressed the development of alternative methods of understanding the world, thus maintaining white supremacist hegemonic dominance deeply within even our most basic epistemological foundations. By becoming such a systemically oriented problem, one that pervades even our most fundamental understanding of the world, it becomes difficult to challenge the transcendental normativity of whiteness in significant and meaningful ways.

Certainly, small aspects of white supremacist culture are continuously changed. Within the past century we have seen several of these movements take place with “success” – the civil rights, feminist, and GLBTQ rights movements are the first that come to mind. However, even these so-called advances are produced through and within the continuum of white supremacist domination. Though limited political rights such as voting and equitable wages are significant in the changes they produce in the lives of those oppressed by systemic white supremacy, they simply are not enough to subvert the foundations of actual Eurocentric ideology. In fact, they are often able to conceal whiteness from view in nuanced ways that maintain its hegemonic dominance. In this way, these movements become tools of white supremacy in their ability to justify their “progress” as a manifestation of the colorblind reality we falsely claim to exist within.

Each of these movements, though undeniably relevant and meaningful in a number of ways, fail to truly subvert the political structure as a whole, as new forms of white domination and hegemonic power structures are continuing to be revealed and explored by scholars like
Michelle Alexander. In her book, *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander argues that the creation of a more nuanced system of racial caste in the United States has manifested itself in the criminal justice system. Through mass incarceration, white supremacy has legitimated a contemporary manifestation of anti-Black racism, “[l]ike Jim Crow (and slavery), mass incarceration operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race.” Playing into the preexisting essences described previously, this new systemic form of oppression is able to legitimize itself under the guise of reducing criminal activity:

> The fact that more than half of the young black men in any large American city are currently under the control of the criminal justice system (or saddled with criminal records) is not—as many argue—just a symptom of poverty or poor choices, but rather evidence of a new racial caste system at work.

By structuring crime and the way that we enforce it in a way that predominantly targets nonwhites, we construct a cyclical framework that supports the white supremacist identification of Black bodies as criminal.

Following the story of Timothy Thomas illustrated in the introduction of this project, we can use Alexander’s framework further to identify way that a new racial caste system based in “solutions” to things like crime and poverty. Presented with a colorblind language promoting words like “urban,” “low-income,” and “gang life,” the outcomes of these efforts undertaken by our government are themselves supporting white hegemonic dominance. After the riots of 2001, the neighborhood where Thomas lived and was ultimately murdered, Over-the-Rhine, began its

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“revitalization.” Like many “ghettos” existing within the United States, a process of
gentrification wherein the hoarding of real estate and eventual forcible removal of those deemed
“undesirable” took place under the guise of creating a better Cincinnati. Within the
understanding of racism as operative, gentrification is revealed by Tom Dutton, director of the
Miami University Center for Community Engagement, as “a new form of ‘urban colonialism’
where private entrepreneurialism and urban governance become indistinguishable. Poor people,
especially those of color, are not so much the victims of the new urban colonialism as they are
targets for removal.”34 In other words, the intentional victimization of poor nonwhites in Over-
the-Rhine was produced by Cincinnati’s reliance on white supremacist normativity. It then
becomes clear that within a white supremacist understanding, the creation of “desirable”
neighborhoods begin fundamentally with the exclusion of nonwhites.

Further, and in keeping with the exclusionary reality of white supremacy, Over-the-Rhine began to engage in policies that forcibly manufactured the very paradigm of mass incarceration
described by Alexander. With rising crime rates in areas of poverty, Cincinnati enforced a zero-
tolerance mentality in their policing, “[i]n Cincinnati crime is instantly equated to a call for more
police officers, more jail space, more weaponry and technological gadgetry, more surveillance
cameras, more police sweeps (‘Operation Vortex’), and more legislation regulating behavior in
public spaces.”35 The creation of a special unit for “high-risk” (read: Black) communities creates
the beginning of a cyclical criminal justice model, “an elite sixty-man crime-fighting squad code-
named Vortex, which began making sweeps of high-crime areas, or ‘hot spots,’ arresting people

34 Dutton, T., “Miami University’s Center for Community Engagement in Over-the-Rhine,” The Black Scholar, v. 37, No. 3 (Fall 2007). p. 3
35 Dutton, T., “Miami University’s Center for Community Engagement in Over-the-Rhine,” The Black Scholar, v. 37, No. 3 (Fall 2007). p. 3
not just for serious crimes but also for misdemeanors like jaywalking and loitering.” In less than a six-month period during the summer of 2006, over twenty-six hundred arrests were made in Over-the-Rhine.

The rhetorical strategy used to promote the tough on crime stance is truly tragic, as reduced crime rates and development appear to be serving the best interests of the community, “...in April 2006, the Cincinnati Police launched the Vortex operation. My wife and I saw an immediate change...we felt safe again.’ – from Jeffrey Brandt, resident, OTR.” Unfortunately, there are no contexts for us to analyze Mr. Brandt’s subject position, but such an approach, no matter the outcome, is based on anti-Black racism within the larger systemic framework of white supremacy. In fact, approaches like Operation Vortex are directly linked to the fourteen warrants that ultimately resulted in the murder of Timothy Thomas. By delegitimizing the types of crimes we prosecute, and perverting the concept of justice by choosing particular areas to enforce, we merely reinforce our own epistemological foundations, fundamentally based in manufactured ignorance to support white supremacist racist hegemony.

“Racism is embedded within one’s embodied habitual engagement with the social world and how it is weaved within the unconscious, impacting everyday mundane transactions”

- George Yancy

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2. Racism as Habitual Embodiment

Race, then, must be understood as an extremely complex concept that cannot simply be understood as a socially constructed value devoid of significance. Though intellectuals have largely discounted innate differences between “racial” groups, there still exists a lived reality in white supremacist racism that makes the picture much more complex than simply being a false reality. Though these realities certainly are based on subjective human valuation of particular arbitrary physical characteristics, the identification of such factors is responsible for the continuing genocide perpetuated against Black bodies. In this sense, race is an ever-present reality that must be given our constant attention in order to bear witness to the truly incomprehensible number of lives lost in promoting white supremacist domination.

The manipulation of our consciousness and the construction of false knowledge concerning matters of race results in the manifestation of our values not only in our abstractions, but also our bodies, “racist actions are also habits of the body and not simply cognitively false beliefs.”40 Since our knowledge defines our interactions with the world, the embodiment of white supremacist knowledge comes to define even our unconscious movements, actions, and responses to stimuli we associate with our racist epistemology, “[m]uch ethnic and racial hostility is not the product of logical thought but of deep prejudices that are somatically expressed or embodied in vague but disagreeable feelings that typically lie beneath the level of explicit consciousness.”41 The development of a habitualized racial unconsciousness, one that guides our interactions in the racialized interactions that we have with the world, ensures the continuance of white supremacy by distorting its visibility.

The embodied reality of racism can be seen in almost every instance of individual-level expression of white supremacy, though whites themselves becomes unaware of their operation within its normativity, “[w]hiteness, after all, is a master of concealment; it is insidiously embedded within responses, reactions, good intentions, [and] postural gestures.”42 Much like Steven Roach’s heightened response when pursuing Timothy Thomas, the embodiment of racist stereotypes, myths, and fears can determine the ways our bodies interact with the world:

As bodily habits, [such] racist norms are generally taken for granted and thus elude critical consciousness. Yet I content that, as embodiments of racist ideology, they are ultimately inseparable from our mental life (or habits of mind), and as such they can trigger, reinforce, and perhaps heighten oppressive and discriminatory ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in encounters or interactions with racial ‘others’.”43

We must understand that all interactions within such a state of white normativity implicate not only individuals in its continuance, but also systemically situate the problems of racism:

Understanding white privilege as habit explains how oppressive structures such as white domination take root in people’s selves. Racism is not located solely in the individual person; it has a long history of perpetuating itself through political, economic, national, global, educational, and other institutions that are much larger than any individual.44

With a more contextual understanding based in the uniform cultural acceptance of racist ideology, we can assert that racism has become an unconscious norm for most whites, yet another assumption they take to be true in their unquestioned daily lives. Though these habits certainly can be direct, they seemingly shift even the most basic ways in which we come to interact with the world, “[f]or example, to be a white person means that one tends to assume that

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all cultural and social spaces are potentially available for one to inhabit.⁴⁵ Such a habit is based within a colonial ideology that suggests that the world itself is ever expansive and open for white domination. Only through our socialization within white supremacy are we able to reach such a conclusion, and therefore come to enact behaviors that direct us in our movements through the physical world. Further, by restricting the space that others have in the world by indicating their opposition to white experiences, whiteness comes to shape the world itself, as certain bodies becomes restricted from performing particular actions reserved for white people.

Whiteness, when approached through the scope of phenomenology, can allow us to better understand the habits in which it manifests itself in the lives of white people. The skin color of whites indicates privilege to exist within a history of domination, where our habits began to form, “bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which makes the world ‘white’, a world that is inherited, or which is already given before the point of an individual’s arrival. This is the familiar world, the world of whiteness, as a world we know implicitly.”⁴⁶ This implicit knowledge of a white world comes to manifest itself in numerous ways, all which lead to the reinforcement of white supremacist normativity in the United States. Through the manufacturing of habitualized consciousness, whites construct habits in a way that allows for the systemic maintenance of white domination, necessarily relying upon the exclusion of nonwhite bodies.

The actions in this white world are regulated by a sense of bodily comfort, such that if we perform a task that that does not present a conscious threat to our well-being, then we perform it often without recognition of our doing so. In this way, “[t]he body is habitual insofar as it ‘trails behind’ in the performing of action, insofar it does not pose ‘a problem’ or an obstacle to the

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action, or is not ‘stressed’ by ‘what’ the action encounters.” Applied to whiteness, the habits we perform within such a system “trails” the actions of our corporeal movements in the world. Since “white bodies do not have to face their whiteness; [whites] are not oriented ‘towards’ it, and this ‘not’ is what allows whiteness to cohere, as that which bodies are oriented around.” Essentially, this creates normativity in the actions that whites perform in the world, making them a kind of second-nature that numbs our awareness to their occurrence.

Further, since white supremacy is the transcendental norm and forms the basis for our understanding of race in America, the operation of habitual whiteness occurs in almost every public setting, “[s]paces are orientated ‘around’ whiteness, insofar as whiteness is not seen… The effect of this ‘around whiteness’ is the institutionalization of a certain ‘likeness’, which makes non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different, when they take up this space.” The ability of habitualized whiteness to construct and maintain privileges for whites, and subsequently deny the capability of nonwhite bodies to exist in white spaces while retaining their individual subjectivity, creates a white gaze that demands conformity to normativity.

Whites construct stereotypical depictions of Black bodies in order to identify that which is antithetical to the ideal image of whiteness. The use of this racialized knowledge becomes valuable in reifying whiteness, but also produces associations between visible bodily markers that are to be seen as valuable. The very concept of racism “is fueled by the seductive image of body purity and uniformity (that is, normality), which then spawns fear and hatred of alien groups.” Of course, such purity is based on mythos produced by the transcendental normativity

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of whiteness, as no such purity can be measured and is nonexistent outside of a racialized reality. Each of our bodies is necessarily imperfect; though through the white habitualized racial consciousness, the white gaze associates meaning surrounding the differing kinds of bodies we experience in the world that distorts our shared human imperfection.

This gaze situates white normativity such that only those viewed to exist in opposition to white skin are subjected to white eyes, “those on the outside are rejected because they are deemed suspicious, vile, unclean, infestations of the (white) social body.”51 The reactions of whites, when coming into contact with the abnormality of Blackness, are often subtle, yet confronted innumerably in the experiences of Black people. Using “clicks” as a metaphor for car doors locking, Yancy details his experiences:

The clicks attempt to seal my identity as a dark savage. The clicking sounds mark me; they inscribe me, materializing my presence, as it were, in ways that I know to be untrue. Unable to stop the clicking, unable to stop white women from tightening the hold of their purses as I walk by, unable to stop white women from crossing to the other side of the street once they have seen me walking in their direction, unable to stop white men from looking several times over their shoulders as I walk behind them minding my own business.52

In putting words to his experience as the preexisting essence of Black criminality, hypersexuality, and ultimately a problem, Yancy reveals his objectification by whiteness, “[t]o be black in ‘the white world’ is to turn back towards itself, to become an object, which means not only not being extended by the contours of the world, but being diminished as an effect of the bodily extension of others.”53

Clearly, not all the behaviors described by Yancy are necessarily unconscious, alluding to the fact that “whites are not exempt from taking responsibility for the historical continuation of white racism.” However, if we are to view racism as not only a cognitive choice but also a manifestation of our habitualized racial unconsciousness, then we are able to recognize a vastly different systemic framework concerning white supremacy in the United States. Challenging the traditional frameworks that associate racism with individual white prejudices, the embedded nature of our knowledge concerning race indicates that racism itself is necessarily connected to all whites and their daily interactions with the world. The need to trace the genealogy of racism is fundamentally diminished with this alternate understanding, “in a raced and racist world, the psychosomatic self necessarily will be racially and racistly constituted. Race is not a veneer lacquered over a nonracial core. It composes the very bodily and psychical beings that humans are and the particular ways by which humans engage the world.” The recognition that all whites are themselves individually implicated in maintaining white supremacist hegemonic dominance is a realization that we must reach in order to engage in racial reality.

*My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will*
  
  - Peggy McIntosh

3. The “Ambush”: The Recognition of the Opaque White Racist Self

Racism as an embodied, lived experience creates a significantly different reality for those attempting to subvert whiteness as transcendental norm. Rather than being simply based within

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56 Peggy McIntosh (1988), *White Privilege and Male Privilege* p. 96
rationality or abstract notions of antiracist commitment, which exist exclusively within the Cartesian notion of mind/body dualism, embodiment promotes a radically different understanding of racism. Inherent within an embodied notion of white supremacy is the implication that the white consciousness, as a result of socialization, is implicated in the systematic continuance of white supremacy. Thus, not only does white skin connote beneficiary status, as described by Mills, but also imbedded racism that exists within even those most committed to anti-racism. With recognition of one’s own socialized unconscious impulses, we effectively reveal ourselves as connected to the continuance of white supremacist ideology.

Currently, our societal “moral schizophrenia”\textsuperscript{57} concerning racism goes undeniably deeper than the individual, but in order to pragmatically engage with the issue of racism, we must begin the conversation at the most fundamental target: the \textit{white racist}. Though originally developed within animal rights, our consciousness concerning race is necessarily schizophrenic in that the cultural promotion of an outward projection of antiracism is normalized in theory, while the inward reality of white supremacy and its murder of Black bodies is evident within American context. Typically, when whiteness operates within an epistemology of ignorance, white racists become unaware of their beneficiary status and further choose to remain blind to the systemic nature of white supremacy. Recognition of this vastly different reality promotes a new framework, one that traces oppression through the historical legacy of white supremacy previously described. Further, whites must engage in an honest analysis of their social experiences in order to begin their struggle with the embodied nature of their own racism.

The realization that our own understandings of racism and white supremacy are fundamentally flawed, and further the awareness that our social reality and the experiences with

which we contextualize our lives are heavily distorted, results in a traumatic phenomenological
response. This questioning of not only our perception of reality, but also our assumptions about
ourselves, in this case concerning racism, results in what George Yancy calls “ambush.” Stemming from the etymological root “insidious,” ambush suggests “images and scenarios of
being snared and trapped unexpectedly.” The entrapment comes in the form of the systemic
cultural occupation committed by whiteness as unseen transcendental norm. Since most whites
believe themselves to be colorblind and therefore detached from racism, the recognition of
themselves as active members in the perpetuation of racist ideology is necessarily shocking,
“[t]he moment a white person claims to have arrived, he/she often undergoes a surprise attack, a
form of attack that points to how whiteness ensnares even as one strives to fight against
racism.” In this way, even the most outspoken critics of the current white supremacist
framework can be ambushed by their own unconscious racism as operative in their daily lives.
Even seemingly small bodily reactions, like those from the elevator, can promote anti-Black
racism and white supremacist normativity outwardly, even as such whites attempt to subvert
whiteness in some aspects of their conscious engagements with the world.

Ambush involves experiencing a moment of clarity outside oneself, allowing us to view
whiteness as operative in both a systemic and deeply personal way. By recognizing the falsely
constructed reality of a completely colorblind existence in which we often believe we inhabit, we
come face to face with the reality of our own embodiment of racist mythos. Ambush has
powerful effects on our sense of comfort in our knowing of ourselves, and ultimately involves a

MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc. p. 229
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type of “dispossession.” In recognizing the foreignness of the racist within whites often become disillusioned with their own personal reality, as they now understand this dispossessed extension to be their own consciousness. Being confronted by the reality that our moral character is unlike the colorblind persona we have constructed to shield ourselves, and perhaps our very image of self is fundamentally based in falsehood, is a tragic and often physically sickening realization. Though certainly there is a variation among individuals experiencing ambush, almost all experience a sense of disgust and angst at their recognition of their own “twoness.”

Confronted with these warring selves, whites ambushed by their own whiteness gain a glimpse into the systemic nature of whiteness, particularly as operational within their own lives. Yancy describes such a separation, from the white anti-racist self to what he calls the “opaque white racist self,” as an experience that is ultimately out of the control of whites who are experiencing it. This becomes even more problematic when following the colorblind analysis that forms our racialized consciousness before we are ambushed, one that posits an aspect of self-control in our postracist attitudes. When we confront our “other,” this racist self, we recognize our lack of control as a product of whiteness, and ultimately acknowledge the existence of systemic white supremacist framework.

This self, distinct from our consciously constructed identity, is the manifestation of white supremacist socialization in our society. Ambush becomes necessary in a culture of white supremacy, as the recognition of whiteness as transcendental norm is often only evident to nonwhite bodies subjected to oppression. Much like the neighbors of Timothy Thomas in Over-the-Rhine were cognizant of the systemic murder of Black bodies by white police officials, one

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of the most visible manifestations of white supremacist ideology, those oppressed by white domination, face white supremacy everyday. For whites that distance themselves from such experiences through their ratification of the Racial Contract and our epistemology of ignorance, the ambush becomes a necessary facet of our reawakening to the racist reality.

The case of Michael Richards, who famously played the character “Kramer” on the 1990’s sitcom Seinfeld, is one example illustrated by Yancy to illuminate whiteness as ambush. During a his stand-up comedy act at the Laugh Factory in Los Angeles in the year 2006, Richards reacted to a heckler in a true demonstration of the overt racism our culture forces us to harbor:

Shut up. Fifty years ago we’d have you upside down with a fucking fork up your ass. You can talk, you can talk, you can talk. You brave now motherfucka. Throw his ass out, he’s a nigger! He’s a nigger! He’s a nigger! A nigger! Look, it’s a nigger!63

Richards’ attempts to separate himself from the embodied racist within were immediate, a typical reaction that many whites would display in a similar situation. In his apology, made official on the Late Show with David Letterman in the days following the incident, Richards describes himself outside of the racist embodied in his act, “I’m not a racist. That’s what’s so insane about this. I don’t… And yet, it’s said. It comes through. It fires out of me. Even now, in the passion, that’s here, as I confront myself.”64 The confrontation of the white racist existing within Richards’ bodily responses is a very clear case of one being ambushed by their whiteness. Clearly, the dispossession of Richards’ conscious being was elicited, and his embedded socialized white opaque racist self was rendered visible.

64 See “Kramer’s Apology” available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EC26RI-Ria8
Certainly Richards’ example is amplified by his fame, but it does illustrate an almost perfect example of how whiteness ensnares our consciousness at the deepest level, which often results in an unknowing of oneself, or ambush. The viewing of one’s own being as foreign or outside of even their personal understanding is overwhelming. Certainly, Richards’ apology seemed sincere, as even he seemed disoriented by his own self-identified “rage.” Citing his need to do “personal work” and his concern “about more hate and more rage and more anger coming through,” there is undoubtedly a kind of twoness within his consciousness that results in significant trauma to his white epistemic worldview. His use of language still seeks to separate him from his racist actions, but does so in a way that when examined through a framework critical of whiteness becomes connected to the idea of racism as pervasive cultural norm, and further, an embodied reality for whites.

However, this state of inner confusion does not absolve Richards in any way. Yancy justifiably critiques Richards’ clear contradiction: “[h]ow many times does it take a white man to use the N-word before he acknowledges himself as a racist?” As many whites attempt to distance themselves from racism, the often-contradictory nature of what makes someone a racist becomes evident. By separating oneself from acts of overt racism by organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, whites often see themselves as “good whites” in opposition to such a “card-carrying” racist caricature. However, the reality, as we’ve exposed above, is that racism is something that implicates all beneficiaries of a white supremacist framework. Further, acts of overt racism are not necessarily the result of our prepared abstracted intellectual responses, but come as a result of our embodiment of racist mythos.

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65 See “Kramer’s Apology” available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EC26RI-Ria8
Seemingly, the interview with Richards follows the narrative that he is somehow the victim of this dispossession. To be clear, the victims in this scenario are not only those choosing to pay for his stand-up act, but the countless number of Black bodies that have historically and presently been dehumanized and often murdered by the white racist. Richards should not be equated with the real victims of white supremacist domination, as his privileged status as a white man allowed for him to exist outside of reality by choice. Such choices are not provided to Black bodies in a culture of white hegemonic domination. The media in reporting the Richards incident avoided the recognition of this devastating reality, as the use of the N-word became of central focus of the narratives on Richards’ situation. Though the use of such language is certainly connected to our racist epistemology, Richards’ recognition of Black invisibility paired with the use of imagery suggestive of lynching is arguably more concerning. After viewing the interview with Letterman, one might assume that Richards was immediately stunned by his own words, but this simply is not true, “[o]n his way out, one of the Black men shouted back at Richards, saying how unfair it was that he used such language. Richards responded, ‘That’s what happens when you interrupt a white man, don’t you know?’”67 Richards’ participation in the erasure of Black voices, even after his initial outburst, show that this was not simply an act of aggression or a product of a “bad day,” but rather deeply intertwined with the omnipresent racist reality in this country.

My personal experience of ambush is one that I can recall with vivid clarity. During my third semester of undergraduate study, I chose to take a course assigning George Yancy’s “Black Bodies, White Gazes,” a source I continue to cite frequently. As a student without significant background in race, coming from a suburban Cincinnati town with an overwhelmingly white

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population, I was unprepared to face the reality of white supremacy. In reading Yancy’s experiences with whites and their embodied racism, I was sympathetic to his conclusions, but unaware of the full nature such an analysis required. My own ignorance, produced through the embodiment of my opaque white racist self, was certainly not immediately evident to me, and perhaps will never fully reveal itself.

In discussing the implications of Yancy’s claims, my experiences with race were immediately disconnected from my own lived experiences by way of the same Western rationality described previously. Though I believe unconscious, my distancing from the personal racist reality in which I participated was one that became a safe place intellectually. By critiquing the larger systemic framework as the culprit, I was able to effectively cleanse myself of responsibility – I was a “good white” that only participated in anti-racist activism. As one can imagine, the shocking nature of my recognition that the reality I had constructed was fundamentally false was uncomfortable, but nothing in comparison to the physical and mental trauma associated with marginalization.

The recognition of my implication in structures of dominance came when an African-American student, a senior at the time, spoke about his experiences of being associated with myths of criminality, violence, and otherness. One experience, though certainly one that he may describe as less significant than his other encounters with anti-Black racism, placed me in a similar situation. After a discussion on Henry Louis Gates Jr. and his 2009 arrest68, prompted by his attempt to enter his residence on Harvard’s campus, the student described his mother’s anger after learning that he had attempted to enter his home through the back door after finding the

front locked. Though a product of a middle-class lifestyle of privilege, the reality of the students skin color made certain tasks in a white supremacist reality dangerous. This contrasted deeply with my own experiences as a white youth in a similarly middle-class neighborhood, as I often forcefully broke into my home on several occasions after locking myself out. I never considered the implications that my skin color would have in associating me with something other than myself, mostly because I didn’t need to. For no reason other than the color of my skin, I was able to exist as a careless child that understandably made mistakes. In disturbing opposition, my classmate was framed inside the preexisting essence of Blackness constructed through our acceptance of a racial contract, making him a criminal. White skin allows for an existentialist freedom in creation of one’s essence. By ascribing transcendental qualities to whiteness, we have implicitly placed blackness into opposition, creating a binary system that has effects on the lives of those forced to exist as “a problem.”

In finding a similar duality in the experiences that my classmate and I shared, I was forced to confront my privilege as a white person in a country promoting a systemic white supremacist framework. In this moment, racism and its inhumanity associated with it became “real” to me. My choice to ignore the reality of white supremacy in my own life was unable to be operationalized without me recognizing its dysfunction. I was exposed to the experiences of a Black person who I had already developed a respect for, and had judged to be “like me.” I was angered to discover that this inequality existed, and that my colorblind ideal was nonexistent.

My tabula rasa, or blank slate, as a white person had allowed me to exist within a much different reality than my classmate, solely by virtue of the particular pigmentation of our skin colors. The beneficiary status as a person with white skin created an unequal relationship that made me ashamed of myself. This wasn’t the kind of shame that made me feel responsible in
creating change or uplifting the Black victims of oppression, but one that made me disgusted with the cultural framework I had previously recognized as true. This blatant visibility of my privilege was the experience that framed my questioning of the whitewashed nature of reality.

A few weeks after my initial exposure to a divergent reality, my undergraduate philosophy department funded a colloquium event in which Yancy came to my campus for a speaking engagement. After visiting our class directly, we moved to the public setting for his lecture, which centered on the “Elevator Effect” and the unconscious nature of white supremacist racism, along with the psychic damage subjected to Black bodies. It was this space in which my recognition of the deeply rooted nature of white supremacy was realized. Members of the crowd at my university, a place that I felt truly comfortable and intellectually free, spouted hatred and denial in an effort to discount the entire framework presented by Dr. Yancy. Much like he describes in many of his works, he was immediately judged by the preexisting essence of his blackness, which was enforced and used viciously by the primarily white audience. In watching the responses of crowd members, it became easy to see explicit examples of white supremacist ideology in motion. First, the erratic rudeness of one student, who began by raising his tone and interrupting Yancy during his presentation multiple times to insert his own perspective, set the mood for further challenges.

An adjunct professor that taught one of my semester courses questioned Yancy’s experiences, preparing abstract hypothetical situations that allowed her situation as a white woman to be essentially equated with his experiences as a Black male. The protection of whiteness when it is revealed, especially by a non-white, becomes habitual in much of the same way many other racialized habits are formed. Similar to my adjunct’s questioning, Yancy
illustrates how his epistemic certainty is often questioned when presenting his experiences with white supremacy:

What if the purse strap broke and instead of holding it for fear of being robbed, the white woman is attempting to fix it?; What if the white woman on the elevator is physically blind and so does not even notice the ‘race’ of the man?; What if the white woman is claustrophobic and therefore she is simply anxious about being in an enclosed space as opposed to being in an enclosed space with a black man?; What if there is a virtual white woman engaging in racist gestures (pulling on her purse, looking at the black body suspiciously)?; What if the white woman on the elevator is really a cardboard image of white woman, one that the black man only assumes to be real?; What if the white woman is exhibiting behavior that resembles racist behavior, but such behavior is really the result of obsessing about not wanting to appear racist? In short, what if the white woman ends up emulating racist behavior for fear of appearing racist?69

As one can easily identify, such questions are irrelevant and point to many extremely outlandish situations. Further, the questioning of the validity of one’s experiences give us some insight into the invisibility often felt by Black voices. By discounting the Black subjective experience, whiteness can continue to be shielded from the reality of white supremacy; “the ‘innocent’ white self is able to distance itself from any sense of racism through relocating the locus of the problem in the black person’s distorted perception of what the white person on the elevator is actually doing.”70

I felt disgusted and sickened as the talk progressed. Shaking in my seat from adrenaline, my heart pumped furiously from my increased breathing. I was fundamentally disillusioned in my state of ambush; not only with my institution but also with what I thought was a personal understanding of the nature of white supremacy. Raising my hand, I attempted to deflect the clear case of white ignorance in the room. My unstable voice projected example number forty-six of Peggy McIntosh’s *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, “I can choose

blemish cover or bandage in ‘flesh’ color and have them more or less match my skin.”71 As I finished and attempted to make a comment addressing my professor, my ability to speak diminished, and I faded to silence. I began uncontrollably crying in that moment, an experience that Yancy identified, quickly diverting the crowd’s attention back to his words. I felt outside of myself.

In coming to understand the embodied nature of racism through textual analysis, I was not wholly prepared to accept the reality that even those within close proximity are capable of structuring their own blindness in a way that allows them to intellectually confront racism, but limits their ability to implicate their own actions as inherently racist. In that moment, I became confronted with whiteness as normative, such that when paired with the limited understanding of Dr. Yancy’s experiences allowed me to begin to understand some of the very overt ways in which white supremacy functions at a cultural level. These natural conclusions led me directly to confronting my own whiteness, much like my cognizance of the duality of the two oppositional experiences shared by my classmate. In recognizing my own, often unconscious, responses, thoughts, and actions within a framework of white supremacy, I was able to connect my abstract understandings of racism to my lived reality as an incredibly racist and privileged white male.

By no means is this story of ambush meant to make the reader sympathetic to my own reawakening, but rather to provide a personal account of one person’s experiences with the intent of situating it within the theoretical context of ambush. Situations such as this one happen similarly to those invested in white supremacy through socialization. By becoming complacent in the choices in which we participate, even if we may not recognize the depth of choices available, and supporting whiteness and its systematic expressions, we are necessarily implicated.

After recognizing such a reality, one readily begins the conversation with a bit more openness in whether to proceed unquestioned under white transcendental normativity or begin to form a new understanding of the deeply embedded nature of racism. After my ambush, it became difficult to imagine my previous naivety, as it seemed like an entirely new reality was presented, one that made visible my whiteness.

As a phenomenological response to the recognition of oneself as implicated in the continuance of white supremacist norms and ideals, ambush is highly traumatic and can often be life changing. The experiences of the shedding of our comfort as a result of our recognition of a distorted reality allows us to not only view racism as systemic in nature, but also our embodiment of racism and its operation in our daily lives. Though ambush is certainly a significant experience that will change the lives of the white racist in one way or another, it is not enough to produce substantial change in our habitualized racial consciousness. The very development of our embodiment of white supremacy takes a significant socialization, and the process of undoing whiteness within our own lives is very much an impossible task. The understanding of ambush as merely the first step in understanding our white supremacist reality, a kind of “awakening,” is fitting when we consider the pervasive nature of whiteness as an embedded cultural norm.

In this way, “[d]ismantling racism is a continuous project”\(^{72}\) for white people. We must remain cognizant that even a commitment to promoting antiracism comes as a part of white privilege, “[a]s whites attempt to undo power and privilege, they find themselves confronting a

world in which whiteness is not only around them but also working through them."

The authority that whites often afford themselves to speak on matters of race is itself based within white supremacy. One must recognize the innumerable number of ways that they personally enact racialized norms through their white identity, which cannot simply be rejected:

“[w]hiteness is not a flimsy category such that one can simply decide to cast it aside. In other words, while ‘undoing’ whiteness is clearly a performative metaphor, it does not presuppose an ontology of the self that is capable, through a single act of will and intention of rising about the white discursive streams within which that self is embedded.”

Though ambush provides a limited recognition of whiteness to those experiencing it, this should not be equated with even a partial recognition of the limitless forms of white supremacist normativity, and certainly does not indicate one’s separation from their whiteness. Naturally, this makes transcendence impossible of one’s whiteness impossible, as only a conscious commitment to honesty, openness, and continual self-awareness can help whites continue to understand the racist framework that whites have consciously denied in functionalizing their white epistemic worldview.

After ambush, whites truly interested in promoting a betterment of their understanding of white supremacy should develop a conscious commitment to remaining constantly vulnerable to a violent rejection of their epistemic framework concerning race:

Whites who are open to life-affirming and transformative transactions with people of color are not simply waiting defensively in fear of new information that may threaten to destabilize their sense of self. Rather, there is an openness to having one’s world transformed and cracked. Being ambushed within such transactional contexts can lead to

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profound experiences of luminality, throwing the white self into spaces of rich uncertainty and the actual phenomenological experience of the white self as permeable.75

By actively seeking to place oneself within situations, places, and contexts that promote an ambush, whites can constantly challenge white normativity within their own lives. Recognizing the limits of whites’ ability to understand and empathize is fundamental, as they must remain aware of their continued role as oppressors.

Since racism has not ended, there is no need to think as if it has. Some thinkers would claim this is unnecessarily pessimistic, but the extent to which anti-Black racism affects and determines the lives of African-descended people suggests it is a healthy does of reality.76

- Tommy Curry

4. Shifting the Cultural Narrative to Reflect Racial Realism

The understanding that ambush can potentially “awaken” whites to the racial reality almost immediately raises questions concerning the ability to structure attempts to elicit ambush readily in whites. Philosophers and theorists who take interest in the concept of ambush may attempt to provide pragmatic solutions that suggest ways that we may create spaces for ambush with the ultimate goal of subverting racism in America. The problem with the promotion of hope in an antiracist future is that it often justifies the use of a colorblind framework in understanding current social relations. Such a destructive illusion provides whites who undergo ambush the ability to think of themselves as antiracists, when in reality their role in racism is ever-present and permanent. Therefore, frameworks that seek to totally subvert the reality of whiteness as transcendental norm are misguided and bound to fail. However, by theorizing and working in our

communities to promote a more realistic understanding of race and racism in America, we may produce the possibility of change in the lives of those mercilessly victimized by white supremacy.

For this reason, any pragmatic approach attempting to subvert white supremacy must immediately implicate the “signatories” within such a culture as responsible for maintaining its dominance. White people themselves should be the primary audience of those promoting antiracist frameworks, as they are the perpetrators and bystanders of our current racial reality. Antiracist activism understandably may take interest in the ambushing of white consciousness with such an understanding. For it follows that those implicated in maintaining the reality of racism are those with the moral responsibility to promote the systemic change of such an oppressive system. This should not be misunderstood, as white voices should not promote the whitewashing of any antiracist movement. Instead, whites must understand their position of ignorance and remain open to understand their own role within the conscious and unconscious racism. Theoretically, fewer whites consciously supporting even a small aspect of white supremacy would increase the changes of producing a tangible change in the lives of their victims.

Though white people are the basis of the continuation of racism, the development of pragmatic theory itself must not focus solely on their ambush, but rather the reality of white supremacy. Ambush is meaningful for whites in a personal sense, allowing for a more intimate awareness of oneself as a cultural agent, but it does little to subvert the oppressive reality experienced by nonwhite bodies saturated by racism in their daily lives. Rather than seeking an individual ambush, we must divert our focus to the systemic framework responsible for such a reality, based within the systemic cultural hegemonic dominance of whiteness, which pervades all structures and institutions. In this way, we must be vigilant to avoid centering our efforts on
rehabilitation, but must rather seek to expose whiteness. Thus, the theoretical escape from a white supremacist reality would require the promotion of a particular kind of cultural narrative that renders whiteness visible such that conditions for a promoting ambush are embedded within the very structure of the narrative itself. In structuring the cultural narrative to reflect the reality of white supremacy, the goal of exposing more whites to their role as racists would thus be achieved, but also the subversion of false knowledge production that allows for such an epistemic worldview in the first place.

By operating within a cultural framework that denies both its own whiteness and also the continuance of racism, we become trapped within the theoretical boundaries of our knowing. Without the promotion of ambush in our current cultural narrative, our goal to attempt to subvert white supremacy becomes ultimately unattainable. Without an understanding of the complexity of white supremacy’s shielding, efforts to support systemic change often fall into the very norms that they began in an attempt to dismantle. The intangible nature of whiteness makes it difficult to provide pragmatic solutions to subverting the white supremacist. For this reason, this paper will not fall into the cyclical nature of such pragmatic responses that so often prove irrelevant and misguided.

Rather, I believe that by calling for preconditions that first allow us to theorize ways to begin to structure an alternative cultural narrative, we can approach the daunting and inconceivable task of creating a culture that is active in promoting the ambush of its white racists. Such preconditions effectively display the inability of our current culture, which is deeply entrenched within white supremacy, to fully escape the ways that a Eurocentric framework influences our engagements with the world. With an understanding of the racial reality, as well as the intellectual roots that have allowed for the emergence of racism in modernity, we can
begin to effectively center our cultural narrative on new values, goals, and strategies that attempt to establish a permanent antiracist movement.

One of steps in constructing a new cultural narrative is the promotion of a lived experience based in subjectivity for all humans. In order to shift the foundations of racism, we must alter our philosophical foundation in Western rationalism to one based within an understanding of phenomenology that accounts for the lived realities of Black bodies. Though white supremacy has existed for thousands of years, often in less systemic ways, the most major development has taken place since the Enlightenment period. Assertions within this period uphold a disembodied truth that is necessarily based within an understanding of Eurocentric values:

Since knowledge is largely based on sensory perception whose relatability often proves questionable, philosophy has long been concerned with critique of the senses, exposing their limits and avoiding their misguidance by subjecting them to discursive reason. Western modernity has essentially confined this philosophical project to the analysis and critique of sensory propositional judgments that defines traditional epistemology.77

By discounting bodies and their ability to provide us with knowledge, and by purposefully structuring truth in a way that upholds hierarchical dominance, the dualistic foundations of modernity effectively silenced all other methods of inquiry.

The transcendental qualities assigned to the soul proposed during the Western enlightenment were dualistic in nature, “[t]he Platonic emphasis on the purified soul, the Cartesian focus on the ‘cogito’ experience, pull us toward a vision of self within which an immaterial rationality is central. The body has frequently been relegated to a secondary or

oppositional role, while an incorporeal reason is valorized.”78 This duality has created a deeply problematic reality for those deemed irrational. Since whites claimed hegemonic dominance that gave them sole access to truth based in the Eurocentric value of rationality, they were able to effectively assert their superiority, “[o]ne of the compelling reasons to challenge Cartesianism has to do with its far-reaching social effects. This hierarchical dualism has been used to subserve projects of oppression directed toward women, animals, nature, and other ‘Others.’”79 By simply projecting “Others” to be irrational, those supporting this dualistic framework could subjectively assign valuation to particular groups without personal consequence.

By associating those outside of a certain group with irrationality, one necessarily equated their existence with the corporeal body, or the instinctive, uncivilized, and animalistic opposition to the disembodied reason valued within Western modernity. The use of such a technique, one that directly justified the exploitation, enslavement, and murder of those viewed to be outside of rationality, was necessary in order to create systemic hierarchical dominance. The same norm continues to operate in the United States, as oppressed bodies are equated with irrationality and abnormality in every sense. In the case of race in our contemporary understanding, Black bodies are identified with hypersexuality, which renders them an object, necessarily denying their subjectivity and further positing their inherent cultural inferiority to whiteness. With an understanding of the direct influence of Cartesian dualism on contemporary racism and white supremacy, we must construct a new framework with which to proceed.

By rejecting Cartesianism and the broader foundations of the Enlightenment, and instead proposing that our society pursue an alternate understanding of the world based in bodily consciousness, we can begin to understand how a fundamentally different cultural narrative may

be theorized. Developed by Richard Shusterman, somaesthetics is a framework that stresses mindfulness and understanding of one’s body, and “is concerned not only with the body’s external form or representation but also with its lived experience; somaesthetics works toward improved awareness of our feelings, thus providing greater insight into both our passing moods and lasting attitudes.” With an appreciation for the lived experiences of individual bodies, we can begin to construct empathetic responses in all our own interactions with other members of the human race. A culture based in the acknowledgment of lived experiences could promote the kinds of somaesthetic awareness that would give rise to practices to reflect the body’s importance in experiential knowledge.

Using breathing as an example to illustrate basic mindfulness of our embodied reactions, Shusterman asserts, “[c]onsciousness of breathing can therefore make us aware that we are angry or anxious when we might otherwise remain unaware of these feelings and thus vulnerable to their misdirection.” When able to recognize what Shusterman calls a “somatic malfunction,” a result of “oppressive habits of misuse and misperception[s]” that we come to embody via socialization, we become better able to understand the meanings behind our actions. In terms of race and ambush, once whites become aware of the somatic malfunction necessarily taking place within the epistemology of ignorance, they could better understand expressions of their unconscious racism. Ultimately, somaesthetics provides that ability to redefine our cultural narrative concerning both the concept of race and our understandings of racism.

Without a culture based in this phenomenological awareness of one’s body, white exposure to ambush becomes limited, due to the misguided understanding that one possesses the cognitive ability to intellectually deconstruct and further operationalize colorblindness. Within such an epistemology of ignorance based in rationalism, a framework that fails to recognize racial reality through the promotion of humanism, multiculturalism, and ultimately racelessness is promoted such that we fail to recognize the sheer complexity of racism and white supremacy in America. Through the promotion of a colorblind ideology, whites become the primary agents in the erasure of the Black experience. In this way, those choosing to consciously engage in the promotion of antiracist ideals should be concerned with actively seeking to promote an ideal of racial justice wherein all beings have the existential freedom to define themselves outside of a preexisting racial identity.

In order to even begin conversations about constructing a culture that promotes ambush, we must recognize the ways in which whiteness continues to serve the function of negating knowing itself. Colorblindness ideology promotes the assertion that:

raceism disappears because there is no acknowledgement that skin color is relevant to the over-all relationship between whites and African Americans; the conjuring trick of denying racial patterns when progressives challenge poverty and police action, but which come into play when officials determine funding for hospitals, schools, public transportation, disaster relief…

Acknowledging the innumerable ways that whiteness as norm can manifest itself in lived experiences is a powerful ideological stance implying that racism itself cannot be subverted as a cultural norm. A foundation based in the necessarily pessimistic notion of Racial Realism, a

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framework that acknowledges the permanence of racism, is necessary in even beginning to engage in a contemporary analysis of racism in America:

Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary ‘peaks of progress,’ short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies.84

Though certainly one must still operate from the scope of near hopelessness in subverting the larger cultural framework based within white supremacy, an effective antiracist advocate must possess the ability to be comfortable with only a small chance that their work, in the larger context of antiracism, may one day play a role in preventing even a single murder.

Further, the very reality of those lives which are most affected by white supremacy must motivate our stake in the promotion of antiracist values. The life of Timothy Thomas, like so many other Black women and men, was forcibly shortened by white oppression, helps us recognize literally that the streets are riddled with dead Black bodies. Theorizing about the problematic aspects of taking action against a norm you recognize to be foundationally located and likely impossible to subvert becomes irrelevant when confronted with the urgency of anti-black racism and the genocidal reality faced by Black women and men in America.

In order to promote Racial Realism, and place a “human face” on some of the victims of white supremacist domination, we must make our classrooms spaces sites of opposition to colorblindness. Perhaps the most active space in creating white supremacist socialization in America is the current educational system, where the manipulation of education as a tool ensuring the continuance of racism becomes evident. Rather than speaking to experiences of racism in our past, we must acknowledge that racism currently manifests itself each day in the

lives of Blacks in America. History in education must be similarly based in an unwavering and unapologetic commitment to truth from multiple perspectives, undoubtedly placing primacy in the experiences of the oppressed. By exposing and sharing lived experiences in the classroom, we can subvert rhetorical concepts like multiculturalism and diversity in their inability to account for the reality of continued anti-Black racism in the United States.

Further, if the goal is produce a culture that is able to ambush the invisibility of whiteness, we must necessarily implicate the white racist in not only embodying racism, but being responsible in many cases for intentionally refusing to understand reality, “[t]he persistence of white supremacy is not some accident perpetuated by the mistaken moral codes of truly good white folks that have been led astray.” Instead, we must promote the acceptance of an epistemology of ignorance as operative in our society, but caution totalizing white ignorance in a way that deemphasizes the very conscious role that whites must play in maintaining white supremacist domination in this country. In Mills’ mission, he provides perhaps a misguided empowerment to whites that accept his framework:

Naming this reality brings it into necessary theoretical focus for these issues to be honestly addressed. Those who pretend not to see them, who claim not to recognize the picture I have sketched, are only continuing the epistemology of ignorance required by the original Racial Contract. As long as this studied ignorance persists, the Racial Contract will only be rewritten, rather than being torn up altogether, and justice will continue to be restricted to ‘just us.’

We must recognize that even those whites that adopt Mills’ understanding are still products of white supremacist reality, and enact both conscious and unconscious racism even after recognizing the impact of false knowledge in continuing white domination. All whites must

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85 Curry, T. “We Who Must Fight in the Shade” p. 11
understand and accept the hopelessness of transcending their own racism, which is not made explicit in Mills’ assertions:

[t]he failure of Mills framing is not in its descriptive rendering of oppression, but its normative decree – its axiomatic endorsement of an enlightened whiteness – an assertion that whiteness could be without this ignorance and white people could survive in a world that did not deliberately condemn all that was blessed to lack the white stain.87

Such a notion merely continues to reinforce the white supremacist notion of white transcendence, control, and ultimately superiority. If the ability to transcend one’s “past mistakes,” which through the Racial Contract we realize to be unjust, is realizable, the ability for white people to continue their existential construction of morality. By not facing the reality that whiteness perverts our humanity in ways that does not allow us to merely redefine our tabula rasa concerning race, we acknowledge our inability to be absolved from racism.

Within an understanding of Racial Realism, those whites who become ambushed with their whiteness must necessarily implicate themselves as both conscious and unconscious perpetuators of racism, and further reach the conclusion that antiracism will never become the dominant paradigm in this country. The roots of Eurocentric domination, manifesting itself in even the most fundamental foundations of our epistemological framework, are themselves based in the Racial Contract that Mills describes. In this way, the ideological basis for our lives is heavily entrenched in white supremacy, “[t]o remedy oppression is not only the elimination of the actual conditions that sustain oppression and enforce racism, but also the rejection and casting away of the desire, the want, to exercise control over one’s world as the white racist does within a white supremacist society.”88 After all, it was Audre Lorde who famously argued that

87 Curry, T. “We Who Must Fight in the Shade” p. 11
88 Curry, T. “We Who Must Fight in the Shade” p. 11
the “master’s tools can never dismantle the master’s house.”\textsuperscript{89} In this way, white supremacy can never be understood as a system in which we ought to remain if we seek to construct a divergent cultural narrative.

Without an understanding of racial realism, it becomes impossible to structure a cultural narrative that can produce ambush within its very practices and operations. Only with a complete understanding rooted in Racial Realism, our society could begin to reconstruct itself such that an ambush on whiteness could be elicited through even simply watching local news programming. Though intangible, this understanding may have allowed for me to immediately recognize, even as a ten year old in white suburbia, that Timothy Thomas’ murder was an act supported by my own whiteness. Once the reality of white supremacy is realized, noticeable examples of racism and white normativity will become normal features of one’s engagements in the everyday world. Though an understanding of oneself as “other” can never fully be grasp by white people, through honesty and the acceptance of Racial Realism, whites can consciously train themselves to recognize some of the operations of racism in the culture at large. This is the only way we can begin to understand racism in a way that is at least theoretically productive in a cultural sense and firmly based within reality itself.

Certainly, the goal of producing normativity in an understanding based in Racial Realism is itself a pipe dream. Recognizing the impossible reality of subverting the founding values of this country based in white supremacy must be a fundamental part of our understanding of race. This country will never produce equality, since its systemic framework is based upon the demotion of all bodies not conforming to whiteness, the transcendental norm within all aspects of culture. The Eurocentric framework has manifested itself in axiological foundations that are

necessarily based in the promotion of their “objectivity,” and thus makes the model of liberalism in the United States one that is whitewashed.

Ultimately, Americans must recognize the sheer complexity of the white supremacist nation that they live within and its often-incomprehensive circularity. The reality that racism will continue to exist is based within such an intricate and complicated model that must continue to be investigated in order to perhaps change even small expressions of racism in the daily lives of Black people. Though perhaps my own whiteness as the author of this essay may be understood as contradictory to my position concerning the ability of whites to work as antiracists, I believe that acknowledging the inability to cleanse oneself of racism produces a substantially different logical conclusion. Undeniably, however, I will be approached by whites that attempt to insert themselves to fall within what they believe to be a similarly “antiracist” tradition, which fall into the societal norm that “rewards whites who confess their racism.”90 I reject such an antiracist foundation, as I continue to manifest actions that damage the lives of Black women and men. Though potentially habitual at times, I still must recognize that the power in my choice to remain ignorant implicates my consciousness in continuing the societal production of ignorance that ensures the future of racism in America.

Those promoting similar claims from the perspective of whiteness must acknowledge the problematic reality of reorienting their privilege and power to speak on matters of oppression necessarily outside of their understanding, “since now the white racist [perceives themselves to be] armed with a moralism which demands that they as whites speak about racism despite what they actually know or how they actually materially and financially benefit from anti-racist

90 Curry, T., “We Who Must Fight in the Shade” p. 11
discourse. “91 Rather, whites who seek to (re)understand racism within the scope of Racial Realism must enter the conversation with an honesty that acknowledges their deferment to Black experiences of racism. These innumerable experiences and their permanence, which result in the continual torture, rape, and murder of Black men and women in the United States, must form our understanding of racism as a contemporary phenomenon that “lies at the center not the periphery; in the permanent, not in the fleeting; in the lives of black and white people, not the sentimental caverns of the mind.”92

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91 Curry, T., “We Who Must Fight in the Shade” p. 11